

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ www.fbu.org.uk

March 2011



***Why firefighters
should demonstrate
on 26 March***



Our campaign against cuts
explained inside
Pages 7–9, 12–13





Matt Wrack

Demonstrate on 26 March – say no to the cuts

Much of the union's activity since the New Year has been focused on building for the national demonstration in London on 26 March. This event – called by the TUC – gives us an opportunity to step up the fight against the huge cuts we face.

There has not been another period in living memory when our service has been under such a sustained attack. The cuts proposed are huge and will devastate our service. They will undermine the outstanding work which FBU members carry out every day of their careers.

Response times

The BBC recently carried a report about the possibility that the number of fires may have risen. Concern was expressed about the risk of increased injuries and increased fire deaths. The FBU has been warning of this for some time. Our report last year, *It's about time*, on emergency response times condemned the complacency that exists in government on this issue – a complacency that is regrettably reflected among some people in senior professional positions within the service itself.

Response times have slowed from an average of 5.5 minutes in 1996 to 7.3 minutes today. This is a disgrace. Yet the only body campaigning on the issue is the Fire Brigades Union. Others want us to keep our mouths shut on the issue

– we will not. The current cuts agenda will only make this worse and will endanger our members and the wider public. When we fight to defend our service we are protecting ourselves and the communities we serve.

Pay and pensions

Since January I have been out on the road meeting FBU members in various regions and brigades. All are concerned at the attacks on our service. All are rightly concerned and angry at the attacks already

taking place on the living standards of our members and our families. A pay freeze while prices and taxes go up is a pay cut. The proposals for our pensions are exactly the same – a way of cutting our pay.

The government proposes an increase in contributions. For most FBU members this means a rise from 11% to 14.2%. This is a 29% increase! At the same time the government plans to change the way pensions are increased each year by shifting from using the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Because CPI is normally lower, this is another way to take money from us and from existing pensioners. Over ten years the pension would be worth approximately 8.5% less.

These are ways of taking resources (wages, pensions, taxes etc) from working people to pay for the bank bailout and to pay for the tax avoidance and evasion at the top. In the UK today we have Robin Hood in reverse – stealing from the majority to give to the rich.



When we fight to defend our service we are protecting ourselves and the communities we serve

Your pay, your pension and your job are threatened by the policies of the Tory-led coalition. It's time to stand up and say: Enough is enough

Join us on 26 March

There are a host of reasons to join us in London on March 26. Your pay, your pension and your job are threatened by the policies of the Tory-led coalition. The future for the next generation and for our elderly looks increasingly bleak. It's time to stand up and say: Enough is enough.

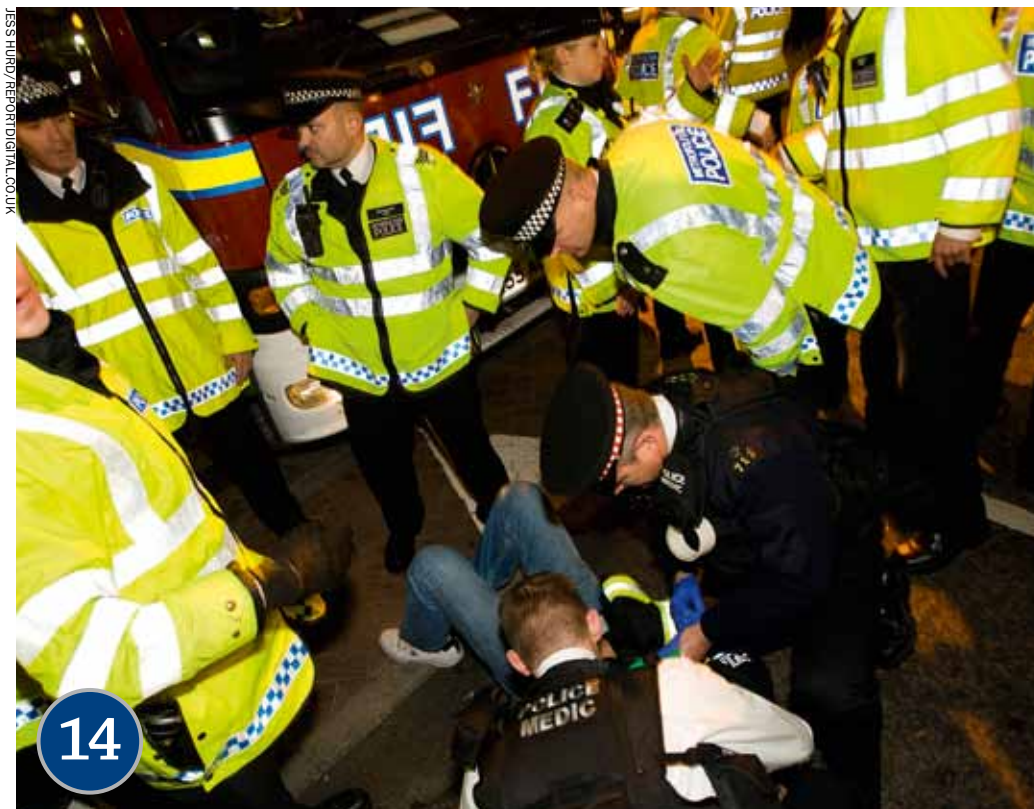
I hope to see many of you on the demonstration in March and at our local meetings.

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LETTERS

FBU history – get in touch

November 2011 will mark the 60th anniversary of the 1951 fire service “spit and polish” dispute. The FBU is keen to celebrate in *Firefighter* magazine what was the first nationwide industrial action in the fire service. We are contacting retired members of the union who may have been in the service at that time to try to get first-hand information about the dispute, the mood on the stations and what the service was like in those days.

I have been asked to assist the union with this research. I served as a firefighter at Basildon in Essex for nearly 30 years and was active within the union throughout my service, eventually as executive council member for East Anglia. I have written about the fire service and FBU history in journals and books. I base my work as far as possible on information from people who were active at the time. Would you be willing to tell us of your experience of the 1951 dispute, either in writing or by interview?

I would also welcome your experiences on other aspects of FBU and fire service history. The union will celebrate its centenary in 2018, and it is planning further publications in the coming years to mark the occasion properly.

I can be contacted at: 01223 894699, t.segars@tesco.net. Alternatively, please write to me via FBU head office, c/o the communications and research department.

Terry Segars

RDS deal finalised after years of work

Terms and conditions

After years of concerted effort to achieve equality for firefighters working the retained duty system, the FBU has finished negotiating an agreement to bring parity between wholetime and retained firefighters on terms and conditions.

The deal follows the landmark House of Lords judgement in 2006, which found in favour of the FBU. This was referred back to the original employment tribunal with final victory being secured in 2008. The employment tribunal in Belfast is following events in England to inform its findings on cases registered there.

Andy Dark, FBU assistant general secretary, said: "For some three years now the FBU has been seeking the implementation of that successful award.

These negotiations have been taking place with the national employers on terms and conditions and the Grey Book. Separate negotiations have been taking place on the changes required to give pensions equality."

The FBU's executive council and the national retained committee have sought three outcomes:

- 1 Protection of bounty payments where they had previously been paid to individuals;
- 2 Equal provision in the Grey Book for retained firefighters;
- 3 Compensation payments for as many members as possible taking into account rank/role and length of service.

While the principles of equality were easily identified, securing a robust mechanism to achieve this has

taken some considerable time.

The union has secured the services of Popularis, an independent scrutineer, to assist in the processing of members' claims – a process being mirrored by the national employers for non-FBU members.

The union will write to members with details of their compensation settlement and the data used by their employer to calculate the payment.

Members who submitted a claim to the employment tribunal in 2001 will be asked if they agree to the settlement and to withdraw their claim.

Members who do not wish to settle on the terms negotiated by the FBU will be at liberty to pursue their claims without the FBU underwriting their legal costs.

However, there is an appeal mechanism for members to challenge the payments calculated by their employer. Where there is sufficient evidence to support such an appeal, the FBU will provide support.

Retained members should pay close attention to the documentation they receive from the FBU and bear in mind the importance of meeting the deadlines it outlines.



The FBU campaign to achieve justice for retained duty system firefighters has required persistence and determination – this illustration dates from June 2004

Denise Christie:
Coalition cuts
will have a
disproportionate
effect on women

PICTURE: MARTIN JENKINSON



London dispute lifted after vote

London

The Fire Brigades Union in London has formally ended its trade dispute over mass sackings after members voted overwhelmingly for new shift start and finish times.

The FBU told the London Fire Brigade that it was lifting the dispute on 11 February, following an all-reps meeting and a decision by the London regional committee.

London FBU members voted by 87% at the end of last year for a new collective agreement, which included a 10.5-hour day shift and a 13.5-hour night shift. The deal was thrashed out after the union's

industrial action forced management to suspend temporarily the threat of mass sackings that had triggered the dispute.

Ian Leahair, FBU executive member for London region, said: "Our members stood firm and in the end the brigade was forced to reach agreement with us rather than carry out their threat of mass sackings." He said the agreement provided for new working patterns that were more agreeable to members than the original proposals.

"The brigade should think twice in the future before trying to get their way through the threat of mass sackings," he added. "We fought them off this time, and we would do so again if necessary."



SOUNDING OFF

Why we celebrate International Women's Day

Denise Christie, executive council member for women

8 March this year marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. The FBU's national women's committee and our sisters in other TUC unions will recognise the amazing women who inspire us in our communities, trade unions and around the world.

The TUC women's conference will also celebrate the event. High on the agenda is the disproportionate impact the coalition's cuts will have on women. We have already seen this in the fire and rescue service, with the recruitment targets agenda being pushed back and resistance to properly funded maternity pay as well as management pushing the unisex fire kit and unisex facilities agenda. We all know this is a cost-cutting exercise that affects women members the most.

Our fightback not only covers women in the fire and rescue service, but women in all societies – locally, nationally and internationally. The majority of women work in the public sector where most of the cuts including pay freezes, increased pension contributions and job losses are planned. Women rely more on public services and benefits than men. The cutting of child benefits, reducing maternity grants and limiting working families' tax credits will all affect women the most and, ultimately, children – the future generation. If there ever was a time to fight back, it is now.

Our women reps, officials and members will be involved in these campaigns, supporting our sisters. But we cannot do this alone. We need our brothers to stand up and fight these attacks with us. Unity is strength and strength is unity. Get involved in your local demos and rallies and make your voice heard.

The TUC March for the Alternative on Saturday 26 March will see a coordinated response and fightback to these ideological cuts.

FBU wins point on the right to speak to elected representatives

Essex

The FBU has won an important battle to defend firefighters' right to express their views to elected representatives without fear of victimisation.

Last month an Essex firefighter won his appeal to be reinstated following his on-the-spot sacking in January.

The sacking was triggered by a letter sent in confidence by the firefighter to his local councillor expressing concern about financial incentives causing divisions within Essex fire service and questioning other

financial decisions made by two fire chiefs.

FBU regional secretary Adrian Clarke said: "It is a democratic principle that constituents can write to their MPs and councillors on the basis of confidentiality and without fear of reprisals from those they refer to in that correspondence."

Three Essex firefighters have received disciplinary sanctions in relation to letters to MPs and councillors and more than 40 others face disciplinary hearings.

Former fire minister Baroness Smith and MP Kate Hoey have backed the union's criticism of the disciplinary cases.

County cuts campaign

Suffolk

Suffolk FBU members held a successful rally in Ipswich last month to launch their campaign against county council plans to slash frontline emergency services.

Despite busier roads and a growing population, the council wants to end the year with the worst service to the public since the days of horse-drawn appliances and hand-operated pumps.

Andy Message, acting brigade secretary for Suffolk, said: "Never before have cuts like these been proposed to the people of Suffolk. But they do not have to happen. The integrated risk management plan is the public's chance to have their say."

"We call on council tax payers, parish and town councils and businesses to respond to the document and make it clear public safety is important to them."

"Put simply, some people, because of budget cuts, will have to wait longer for a fire engine. Residents and visitors of Suffolk will pay for these changes with their lives."

"Suffolk fire and rescue service does not belong to the chief fire officer, the chief executive or even the county councillors. It belongs to the people of Suffolk, who look after the service until it is time to hand it on to the next generation."

"We should all ensure our children and grandchildren do not have a worsened service."



'Intense, but excellent value,' was the general verdict on the FBU national school at Wortley Hall near Sheffield in November – 41 officials took part

Senior FBU officials are speaking at fire stations across the UK about the union's campaign to defend the fire and rescue service. Contact brigade officials for details of local meetings, or go to www.fbu.org.uk

Scotland merger talks launched

The Scottish government has announced plans to consult on restructuring the fire and rescue service by merging the country's eight brigades into one.

Roddy Robertson, FBU executive council member for Scotland, said: "If the move is to one service then the FBU's job will be to mitigate the impact on individuals and ensure that they get the best opportunities available, including redeployment, relocation or retraining where necessary. We have a clear policy on compulsory redundancies, which will involve industrial action if implemented."

IN BRIEF

Floods – we want a law

The FBU's campaign for a law governing fire and rescue services' responses to floods has received support from an important parliamentary committee.

The House of Commons environment committee report *Future flood and water*



management legislation was published in December and supports FBU arguments.

It said: "We recommend that the government places a duty on fire and rescue authorities to undertake specified flood rescue preparation and response work, and that provision of adequate resources for this work is included under the funding formulae applied to emergency services."

Andy Dark, FBU assistant general secretary, said: "The government should now change the law accordingly, and give fire and rescue services the resources to respond to floods."

No to slow response standard

The FBU is urging Surrey County Council to stop misleading the public and set a response standard that truly protects people. The council has told the public: "We aim to have one fire engine at these critical incidents within 10 minutes and a second one within 15 minutes on 80% of occasions." But the council does not say from what point that time is measured.

Richard Jones, FBU brigade secretary for Surrey, said: "We have challenged this misleading emergency response standard, but the council need to come clean and include the call handling and mobilising time in the standard. We urge Surrey County Council to stop misleading the public."

Wales rejects voluntarism

The FBU has rejected plans for paid volunteers to replace fulltime fire-fighters in Powys as part of plans to save £1.2m. Lawrence Larmond, FBU secretary for Mid and West Wales, said: "If these proposals go through, then throughout Powys you would have no guarantee of a response from the fire service to a 999 call. We have massive distances between fire stations to cover. A lot of the county is mountainous and affected by severe weather."

NEWS FOCUS

Marching for jobs,
growth and
justice



STEFANO CAGNONI

Firefighters at the FBU's lobby of the Westminster parliament last November

Ten reasons why we should demonstrate on 26 March

National officer Dave Green explains why firefighters should be out in force on the TUC demonstration

TUC march

Some fire authorities and boards face a 9.5% cut to their central grant next year. The government wants a 25% cut for all over four years. These cuts will cost lives – of the public and of firefighters.

There are at least ten reasons to come on the TUC's national demonstration against the cuts on Saturday 26 March.

Hands off our pensions

1 The Westminster government plans to increase pension contributions in all public sector schemes. For most FBU members this would mean a rise from 1.1% to 14% – an increase of 29%. For most firefighters this means **at least £700 per year**.

2 Plans to introduce career average schemes and higher (tiered) contributions for higher earners will hit officer members even harder.

3 There are plans to increase retirement age for the majority of firefighters. Instead, we should be lowering the retirement age for those in the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Stop the cuts

4 No to cuts in fire service budgets. Over three-quarters of fire service budgets are spent on firefighters. The service is already cut to the marrow. Cuts of this scale could put **thousands** of firefighter jobs at risk over the next four years.

5 The cuts agenda will mean even more attacks on local conditions of service as employers seek to balance budgets. That will mean more attacks on shift/duty systems and other local conditions of service.

6 The cuts agenda means we face another vicious round of cuts: station closures, scrapping pumps and specials, reduction of cover at night – all in order to achieve the centrally driven cuts.

Defend living standards

7 No to the pay freeze. We have had no pay rise this year. The government wants our pay frozen again. With inflation at 5% and the cost of living for basics like food and fuel spiralling, our standard of living is under serious attack.

8 The increase in VAT and other government tax and benefit measures will cost working families **£1,500 a year**.

Defend our service

9 Cuts have already slowed response times. Since 1996 response times have slowed from an average of 5.5 minutes to 7.3 minutes. Crewing, shift patterns and night cover are under threat. This is bad for firefighters and bad for the public. The fire service is an outstanding public service – **don't let them wreck it**.

10 No to privatisation. Profiteering vultures like AssetCo are circling the fire service. This government is introducing the market into the heart of the NHS and education, selling off everything in sight. Stop these assetstrippers – defend our fire and rescue service.



NO PROTECTION FOR THE FRONTLINE

After much speculation came the facts. The reality of cuts to the fire and rescue service became apparent in January, when the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) confirmed its Local Government Settlement.

CLG published figures for the central grant allocated to metropolitan and combined fire authorities in England. Figures for county fire authorities in England, and for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were not made available.

This is the first stage of the government's plans, announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review (October 2010), to cut the central grant to fire authorities by 25% over four years.

The scale of cuts planned for metropolitan and combined fire authorities in England over the next year (2011-12) is summarised on the map.

The central point is that these figures are **very bad news**. They show that the fire and rescue service has not been protected. The overall cut

in central funding is £62m or 5.8%. But in many cases, fire authorities face a cut in their central grant of over 9%.

Metropolitan authorities hit hardest

One feature that stands out is the way metropolitan fire authorities have been hit hardest. Metropolitan fire authorities have been hit twice as hard (9.4%) as those in combined fire authorities (4.7%). However some combined authorities have still been hit with the maximum cut.

The FBU is clear that these cuts will wreck the fire and rescue service. They are not being made on the basis of needs or risk. They have decided arbitrarily to meet the government's forced-march deficit reduction target. The cuts will put the public and firefighters at risk. That's why the FBU will oppose cuts, with all industrial and political means available.

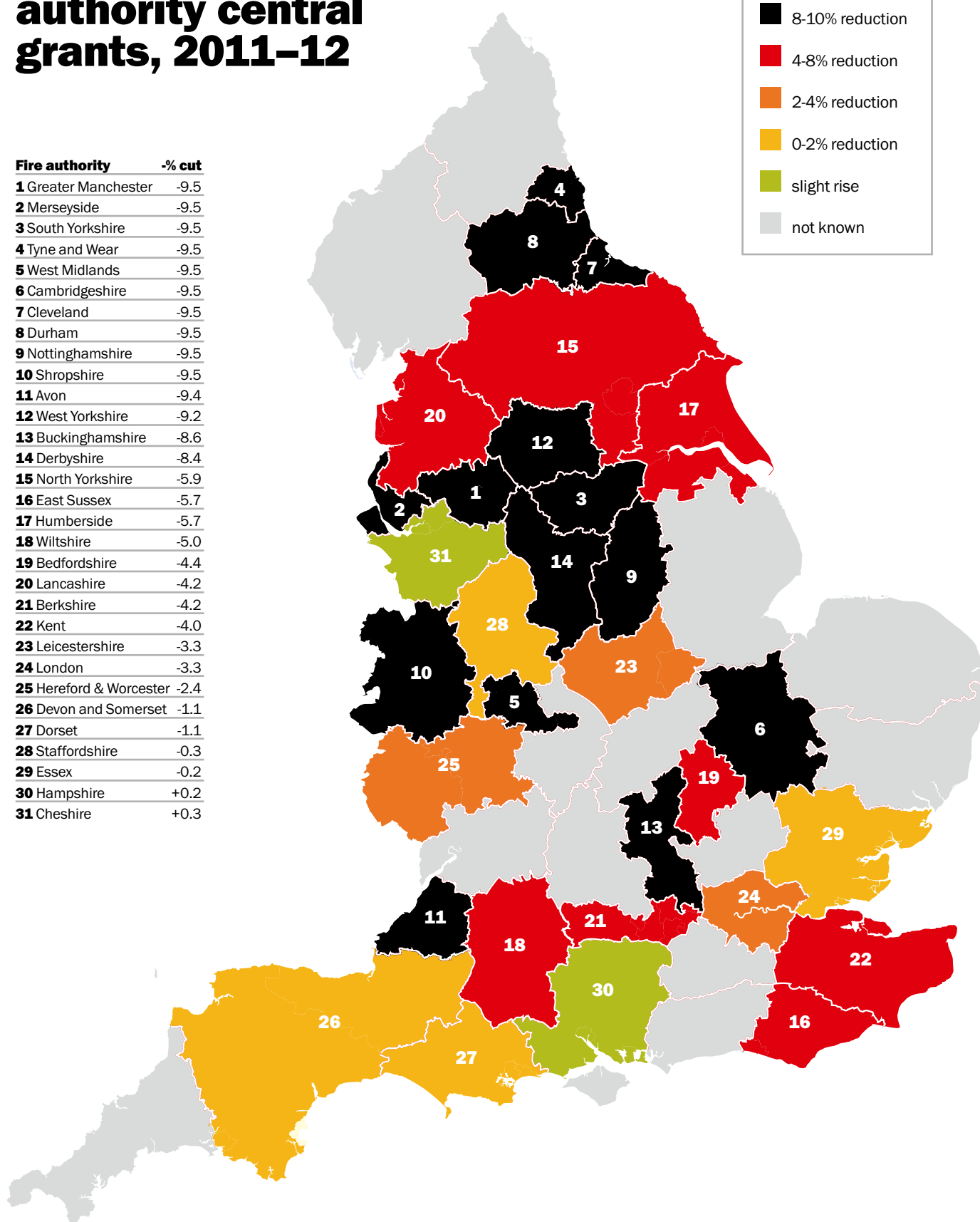
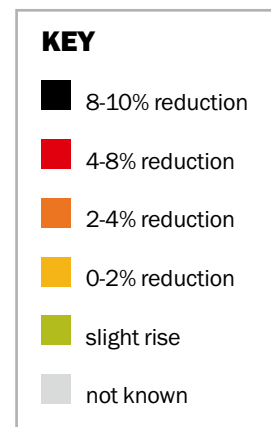


More information: *The Local Government Finance Settlement 2011/12 can be found at www.local.communities.gov.uk/finance/1112/grant.htm*

These cuts are being made arbitrarily to meet the government's deficit reduction target

Reduction in fire authority central grants, 2011–12

Fire authority	-% cut
1 Greater Manchester	-9.5
2 Merseyside	-9.5
3 South Yorkshire	-9.5
4 Tyne and Wear	-9.5
5 West Midlands	-9.5
6 Cambridgeshire	-9.5
7 Cleveland	-9.5
8 Durham	-9.5
9 Nottinghamshire	-9.5
10 Shropshire	-9.5
11 Avon	-9.4
12 West Yorkshire	-9.2
13 Buckinghamshire	-8.6
14 Derbyshire	-8.4
15 North Yorkshire	-5.9
16 East Sussex	-5.7
17 Humberside	-5.7
18 Wiltshire	-5.0
19 Bedfordshire	-4.4
20 Lancashire	-4.2
21 Berkshire	-4.2
22 Kent	-4.0
23 Leicestershire	-3.3
24 London	-3.3
25 Hereford & Worcester	-2.4
26 Devon and Somerset	-1.1
27 Dorset	-1.1
28 Staffordshire	-0.3
29 Essex	-0.2
30 Hampshire	+0.2
31 Cheshire	+0.3



FiReControl scrapped: what next?

Sharon Riley, executive council member for control, explains what the FBU wants now the FiReControl project has been scrapped

The FBU's longest-ever campaign – against regional fire control centres – has finally come to an end. The government announced on 20 December that the ill-fated project was to be scrapped.

Over the last seven years the FBU has been the only consistent voice of opposition to the project. The union recognised from the outset that a national project of this scale would not be deliverable and indeed would not be beneficial for the fire service or the public.

We got used to hearing others repeat the mantra that the FiReControl project was going to provide greater resilience and would save money! We got used to other stakeholders adopting the “Yes Minister” approach as fire minister after fire minister picked up the poisoned chalice.

In all, we saw off nine fire ministers throughout the life of the project and still the only voice speaking up for emergency fire controls, the service and our firefighter control members was the FBU.

What next?

The government has launched a three-month consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England, stating that it “does not intend to impose any solution for the future of control room services in England”. Fire and rescue authorities will be free to determine their own priorities.

However, a note of caution. Despite the launch of the consultation in January, several fire authorities have forged ahead with plans to outsource or merge their control functions. At the time of writing, Isle of Wight fire and rescue service is looking to outsource its control function to Surrey, Suffolk fire and rescue service to outsource its control to Cambridge and rumours of a North West consortium and Thames Valley control are on the cards again. The FBU stands ready to defend our members' jobs, terms and conditions once again.

Review the options

The FBU has called for a moratorium on such decisions until the consultation has ended on 8 April. It is not yet known what, if any, legacy equipment will be available to fire and rescue services from the defunct FiReControl project. While no one wants to see the return of a one size fits all solution, it does seem sensible to review fully the options before making any decisions.

Perhaps one of the most costly legacies of the project, in terms of finance, is the new buildings. Each costs millions of pounds a year in rent (£1.8 m for the south east alone). The government has offered first refusal to fire authorities on the buildings, offering to contribute to some of the rental costs. But it is hard to see how any of these oversized, overspecified, white elephants can be of any benefit. Running costs alone would make them out of reach for most authorities. What





Control room staff at an FBU national rally and lobby of parliament to oppose the FiReControl project

2004

As we predicted

"An FBU report – Out of Control... says the government has consistently overestimated savings and underestimated costs, relying on a makeshift business case based on poor quality – and sometimes wrong – information. In short, regional controls may well be a money pit for public money with no real benefits."
Firefighter magazine, July/August 2004

"There are question marks over whether the massive £1bn-plus costs are value for money and whether the plans will work at all. There are dangers that council tax will be pushed up or the frontline fire service cut to pay for cost over-runs on the communications system."
Matt Wrack, Firefighter magazine, December 2005



little equipment has been installed in the buildings is already being stripped out by Cassidian (EADS) in a salvage operation.

But the real cost to our members and their families has been the stress and uncertainty over their jobs for the last seven years. This is not set to end any time soon as we now embark upon a further period of what happens next. It should not be forgotten that, despite this uncertainty, the hollow promises and frankly diabolical treatment, our members in controls have continued to provide a first class, professional, emergency service.

Voice of the professionals

I hope that in the "lessons learned" section of the consultation this service and its dedication to duty are recognised.

The government should also recognise that stakeholder involvement and meaningful consultation is essential for any future plans.

Furthermore it is the FBU that is the voice of the professional firefighters and firefighter control members. We will, of course, be making a submission to the consultation and will ensure that the voices of the professionals are heard.

We are now operating in a very different and challenging economic and political environment. But if we approach the future with eyes wide open, with better communication, consultation and a respect for the professionalism and dedication of those working in fire controls and the service they provide, we may yet be able to move forward together to meet these challenges.

THERE **IS** AN

The Fire Brigades Union believes there

Why government cuts are wrong

Public debt is not high by historic or European standards

www.ukpublicspending.co.uk

The budget deficit was caused by the recession

- Budget deficit 2010-11 = £140bn (est)
- Tax gap due to the recession = £103bn

Socialist Economics Bulletin



Cost of the banks' bailout in terms of capital injections = £117bn

ONS monthly Public Borrowing, November 2010

Half year profits of five biggest UK banks = £15bn

Financial Times, 6 August 2010



£81bn: cuts announced by the government, October 2010

Comprehensive Spending Review



£77bn: increase in wealth of 1,000 richest people in Britain

Sunday Times Rich List, April 2010



Government waste

- Cost of Trident replacement = £100bn (£3.3bn per year)
- Liberal-Democrat manifesto 2010*
- Cost of war in Afghanistan = £2.6bn
- The Guardian, 13 February 2009*
- Cost of private consultants in the public sector = £1.8bn

PCS, There is an alternative

1.6m jobs threatened by government cuts

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 1 November 2010



ALTERNATIVE

There is money to pay for public services



How to fund public services

Collect the missing billions

- £25bn: tax "legally" avoided by the rich
 - £70bn: tax evasion
 - £28bn: tax uncollected
- PCS/Richard Murphy, Tax Justice and Jobs*

Stop the tax giveaway

- £12.4bn: amount given to business by 2014-15 as a result of cutting corporation tax from 28% to 24%.
- £36bn: annual tax breaks given to private pension funds

Socialist Economic Bulletin, 24 January 2011

Tax the wealthy

- "Robin Hood" tax on financial transactions = £20-30bn a year
 - Tax relief cap = £10bn
 - Empty property tax = £5bn
- TUC, A socially just path to economic recovery*
- 50% income tax band at £100,000 = £4.7bn
 - Uncap National Insurance Contributions = £9.1bn
 - Abolish tax havens and tax "non-doms" = £10bn
- Compass, In place of cuts*

Get the banks to lend

- The UK government owns Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley + 84% of RBS and 41% of Lloyds TSB

PCS, There is an alternative



Britain's 20 biggest companies have more than 1,000 subsidiaries in offshore tax havens.

Mail on Sunday, 22 January 2011

Create jobs building homes and clean energy/transport

- 92%: amount recouped by the state in tax/fewer benefits from public sector jobs

Tax Research UK



IAN DAVIES/SHUTTERSTOCK/PA; DOMINIC LIPINSKI; MATT DUNHAM; BRENNAN LINSLEY; PHIL SANDLIN; JOHN PHILLIPS/PHILIP WOLMUTH/REPORT DIGITAL.CO.UK

Experienced journalist Francis Beckett witnessed violence against FBU pickets during the London dispute



STRIKEBREAKERS MOW DOWN A PICKET

I was a few feet away as a fire engine mowed down a picket, and it was a very frightening moment.

It was at Southwark Fire station, where a dozen or so fire engines were due to be brought back after the strike ended at 6pm. I went because, last time, the right-wing tabloids got very excited about what they claimed was obstruction of fire engines by pickets. I thought the stories were invented, and wanted to be a witness to whatever happened. I was, and it wasn't what I expected.

There was a huge police presence – a helicopter overhead, probably 100 officers – and they organised the picketing relentlessly. Eight pickets were to be allowed; the rest of the demonstrators were to be penned in diagonally across the road, so that they could not get anywhere near the fire engines as they entered the small street leading to the place where they are parked. It was pretty frustrating for the striking firefighters, but they accepted it with remarkable good humour – I didn't hear any complaints, even privately.

The fire engines kept us waiting for a couple of hours, perhaps hoping the firefighters would go home, but they didn't. At last they started coming. The firefighters stayed well away, corralled

behind police lines, and the eight permitted pickets stood in front of the fire engines so they stopped, while the pickets went up and called through closed windows to impassive faces, many of them covered in balaclavas.

The first two fire engines stopped before they hit the pickets, and waited for the two minutes or so the police allowed the eight pickets.

The third didn't stop. It just kept coming. As the pickets ran backwards, fast, the great, heavy red fire engine picked up speed.

I was a few feet from Ian Leahair, the FBU's executive council member for London, when it hit him. At the same moment, the police came running in, realising something unexpected was happening, and one of them went down, too.

The fire engine still didn't stop. Ian's legs and half his body were underneath

I've never seen any vehicle, let alone a fire engine, deliberately driven at people

the fire engine and his face was twisted with pain, and for a terrible moment I thought the huge vehicle's wheels had run over him. So they would have done, if he'd been an inch or two to the left.

At last, it stopped. The driver's heavy, fleshy, immobile face looked down at the confused mass of police officers, some of them trying to rescue the two fallen men, others screaming at the driver to reverse so they could get Ian out. It seemed ages, though it was probably only a few seconds, before the driver finally started to reverse his vehicle. Ian was pulled out and helped to the side of the road, where he sat, in shock and pain, for a long time.

I've never seen any vehicle, let alone a fire engine, deliberately driven at people. The driver cannot have been afraid – there were eight pickets and at least 50 police officers in his clear view.

After that, the police handled all new arrivals very differently. They decided that they were not going to stop the picketing because a driver had endangered the pickets. So they stopped the fire engines themselves, gave the pickets their couple of minutes, then cleared the way for the engines.

And that is how the police, who had started the night thinking they were protecting strikebreakers from pickets, ended up protecting pickets from strikebreakers.



Main picture: Ian Leahair lies injured after being hit by a strikebreaker's fire engine. Above: events leading to his injury. Ian Leahair is seen in the first frame

PICTURES: JESS HURD/REPORT DIGITAL.CO.UK

The directors of AssetCo are hoping to become multi-millionaires if they sell on their company on the back of the bitter London fire dispute.

The company's business has already have been boosted by an endorsement from Bob Neill, the junior Tory minister responsible for the fire and rescue service, who has made it clear that the service will face even more substantial cuts in two years time.

In a statement to MPs last November after the London fire strikes, when AssetCo provided casual contract staff to try to break the industrial action, he said: "I would encourage all fire and rescue authorities to satisfy themselves that they have plans in place and to continue to strengthen these where necessary." (*Hansard*, 8 November 2010)

This amounts to a green light for new business in England for a firm that has aggressively targeted fire services in Britain and the Middle East. It has moved from a potentially loss-making conglomerate to new riches on the back of the public sector.

AssetCo's origins

AssetCo was formed by two Ulstermen, John Shannon and Raymond Flynn, through a management buy-out of British Gas's leasing and asset management operations. It originally owned a rag bag of firms like Treka Bus and Supply 999 Ltd, many of which were sold off at the end of last year.

Others like UV Modular Ltd. went into voluntary administration after incurring losses. AssetCo had substantial debts from previous operations (down from £35m to £18.9m according to its last annual report) and is currently involved in restructuring its affairs with bankers. The latest interim company report in December shows a write down of nearly £5m from disposals.

AssetCo's big breakthrough came from negotiating multi-million private finance initiative (PFI) asset management deals to run the fleets of two fire authorities, London and Lincolnshire. This was followed by the first deal in the country to supply casual contract staff to the London brigade and to manage and run the Abu Dhabi fire and emergency services under a three-year contract. According to a credit report on the company, this changed the earnings

from the main listed company from losses to making operational profits with guaranteed incomes under PFI.

Ex-chiefs

It has only been able to build up this profitable line of operations by recruiting former fire chiefs, most of whom had taken retirement. Abu Dhabi's operations depend on two experienced fire managers from Scotland, Jeff Ord, former HM inspector of fire services for Scotland and head of Strathclyde's fire service, and Brendan MacCaffery, also a former inspector in Scotland and a former assistant commissioner in Strathclyde.

Other key appointments are Roy Bishop, former deputy commissioner for London fire brigade, Lou Gill, assistant commissioner in London, and Mike Thomas, former chief fire officer for Lincolnshire. Nearly all of them are supplementing their pensions with substantial payments from AssetCo.

Wealth

Meanwhile, salaries at the top are not insubstantial. John Shannon receives

Profiting from the fire service

Investigative journalist **David Hencke** looks into the murky world of privatisers and strikebreakers AssetCo



£300,000 and Raymond Flynn, who retired as chief financial officer, saw his salary double from £125,000 to £250,000 last year. Shannon owns nearly 30 per cent of the company – nearly 27 million shares currently trading at 67p. Flynn also owns 7.5 million. Both have also just had a payout of 1.5p dividend per share on the 34 million shares they own between them. Both own land in Northern Ireland.

The company recently appointed Scott Douglas Brown, an Australian, as chief financial officer, who can expect to earn a similar high figure. His previous experience was in America where he was corporate vice president of Parexel which took over his company, ClinPhone, which ran clinical trials for the drugs industry. His wealth can be gauged by the fact that in 2009 he paid over £1.4m for a house, according to Land Registry records.

The chair of the board, Tim Wightman, earns £55,000 a year. He has over 500,000 shares (158,000 in his wife's name). He is also non-executive chairman of Digica, an IT outsourcing company. The three other directors earn £35,000 a year and also have shareholdings.

The company also recently recruited

the former chief executive of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), Andrew Freemantle, to the board. To supervise the London and Lincolnshire contracts the company employs Mark Clissett, a former director of the Body Shop.

Training

Just before Christmas the company set up a new training firm, Capital Training Solutions Ltd. This suggests they are positioning themselves to expand training beyond the work they do to train strikebreakers for London.

The company is being extremely tight-lipped about its next plans. Scott Brown, chief financial officer, told *Firefighter*: "We cannot say anything about our plans while there are discussions about a possible takeover, apart from saying it is not J Hambro which has been a matter of press speculation."



Strikebreakers

returning to London Fire Brigade's Southwark training centre during the recent dispute in the capital

However there is no question AssetCo intends to expand. Scott Brown said the setting up of the training company was part of its strategy to concentrate on fire and emergency services. He said the plans for training were part of a "business as usual" strategy.

AssetCo has moved from a potentially loss-making conglomerate to new riches on the back of the public sector



AssetCo's depot in South Ruislip west of London

MAIL ON SUNDAY

Your welfare

Standing up for health and safety



Firefighters of a certain vintage might remember Lord Young as one of Thatcher's ministers.

Last year the Tory-led government asked him to launch a vicious attack on workplace health and safety.

Although his initial threat to remove the fire and rescue service from health and safety law turned out to be bluster (see *Firefighter* August-September 2010), other government plans will impact on firefighters unless they are stopped.

In October Young published his report, *Common Sense:*

Common Safety. Unions and safety organisations were highly critical.

Hilda Palmer from the Hazards campaign said: "This aims to divide workers by some arbitrary hazardous/non-hazardous line, and so destroy the universality

Workplaces: still hazardous

According to the HSE between April 2009 and March 2010:

- 152 people were fatally injured at work
- There were 26,061 major injuries, such as amputations and burns, to employees
- 1.3 million people were suffering from an illness believed to have been caused or made worse by their current or past work.

of health, safety and welfare law, which protects all workers in all workplaces from injury and ill health."

The Young report talks of simplifying the risk assessment procedure for "low hazard

workplaces" such as offices, classrooms and shops. However there is no evidence to support this recommendation.

These workplaces have major problems with regards to high workplace temperatures. Schools experience very high levels of stress-related illnesses, offices suffer high levels of stress and musculoskeletal disorders and shops see high levels of violence. They are also significant for fire safety.

Vague and dangerous

Young's use of the term "low hazard workplace" is vague and dangerous – it represents a disingenuous exploitation of historical perceptions of the workplace and workplace hazards. It also outrageously overlooks the long-term hazards of occupational illness when absence due to work-related ill health is now almost twice that due to

accidental injury.

The Young report is also part of a wider attack on workplace safety. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is facing cuts of at least 35% over four years – which will have a real impact on enforcement and will let more employers off the hook.

John McDonnell MP said: "Lord Young's report lacks credibility. It has been conducted by a discredited politician who has a history of supporting the employer not the worker.

"The review was rushed through over the summer parliamentary recess, immediately after the new government took office, with limited scope for comprehensive evidence gathering or consultation. The terms of reference were politically loaded and militated against a rigorous evidence-based investigation.

Disingenuously reckless

"The report itself is ill-informed and innocuous at best and disingenuously reckless at worst. When understood in the context of budget cuts, the proposals represent the thin edge of a drastic and damaging wedge – an assault on the basic principles of the right to work in a healthy and safe environment."

The Fire Brigades Union, together with our sister unions in the Trade Union Coordinating Group, which now covers around one million workers, is supporting the health and safety week of action from 28 February to 5 March at Westminster. Activists will lobby MPs about the importance of safety and health in every workplace.



Legal Beagle

Health at work

FBU
FREEPHONE
LEGAL ADVICE
LINE
0808
100 6061

Q I am representing a member who suffers from a back and neck injury caused by a road traffic accident two years ago. She works in administration, sitting down all day, which aggravates her condition. Following advice from her GP she asked for a new chair but the employer has refused to provide one saying that it does not accept my member has a disability.

A The duty on an employer to make a reasonable adjustment applies where a person is disabled as defined in the Equality Act. A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Whether your member's disability affects her normal day-to-day activities will depend on the facts of her case. For acts of discrimination occurring on or after 1 October 2010, in order to establish that someone is disabled it is no longer necessary to show that their condition affects one of the eight capacities which are:

- mobility;
- manual dexterity;
- physical coordination;
- continence;
- ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects;
- speech, hearing or eyesight;
- memory or ability to

concentrate, learn or understand; and

- the perception of the risk of physical danger.

Provided your member can show that she has a disability as defined, then where there is a provision, criterion or practice which puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to people who are not disabled, the employer is under a duty to take reasonable steps so that the disabled person is not put at a disadvantage.

Q I am representing a member who suffers from bipolar disorder. He has been off sick for the past six months. I have

represented him at various welfare meetings and now the employer has called him to a disciplinary hearing. The member has argued that he could return to work on reduced hours and reduced duties but the employer says it is short-staffed and cannot accommodate reduced hours. How can I prevent my member from being dismissed?

A Under section 15 of the Equality Act an employer cannot treat a disabled person unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability where this treatment is not justified.

If the absence is as a consequence of your member's bipolar disorder, the employer is under an obligation to look at alternative measures. If they do not, your member may succeed in arguing that he has been discriminated against as a consequence of his disability.

However, the employer can argue that the reason your member has been dismissed is not because of his disability but because he is unable to work full time.

However, an employment tribunal will require the employer to provide evidence that it could not accommodate your member working reduced hours. In addition, an employment tribunal may find that the employer failed in its obligation to make reasonable adjustments such as working reduced hours and/or having a reduced workload.

Q Have the time limits for bringing an employment tribunal claim under the discrimination legislation changed?

A No, the time limit for bringing a claim for discrimination on one of the protected characteristics is three months less one day from the act of discrimination, or, where the act is continuing, from the last act.

Where there is a breach of a sex equality clause (equal pay) the time limit for bringing a claim is six months from the end of the contract.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

“A great day out”

London firefighters Graham Adams and Andy Collins organised a fun run for the union's hardship fund

Fundraising

It was a day off to remember for firefighters and supporters pounding across Wimbledon Common in the January sunshine. They were out running and raising cash for FBU members who had their pay cut for sticking by the union in the London dispute over shift changes. The race was a big success – and could even be the start of a new tradition.

Graham Adams and Andy Collins, both from New Malden fire station, are the two elite sportsmen behind the sponsored run that raised over £800 for the union's London hardship fund. The FBU Hardship Fund Cross Country replaced a race usually staged by London Fire Brigade every autumn.

It had previously been sponsored by AssetCo, now notorious among London firefighters for its strikebreaking role. Not surprisingly, the brigade's race didn't happen last year – there was no way it was going to take place in the midst of a bitter dispute where firefighters faced the prospect of mass sackings.

Two months to organise

So crew manager Andy and watch manager Graham – both keen running club members – decided to stage the five and a half mile run in south west London, combining a good day out with an opportunity to raise much-needed funds. They had just two months to organise the race.

Sponsorship was not a problem – Blake's, a local driving school, came up trumps. Supporters – and firefighters – proved generous. “We didn't restrict the race to firefighters,” said Graham, a member of Belgrave Harriers. “We wanted people to have a fun day out. People from running clubs took part – but the day wasn't just

about winning. Firefighters have been through a lot recently.”

There have been around 1,000 requests for hardship money. The London Fire Brigade has deducted around £450,000 from FBU members for refusing to do any act management felt reasonable during the dispute – including acting up and volunteering for overtime. Many members lost 20% of their monthly pay.

‘Let's hope there's another’

Sian Griffiths, equality pioneer and union activist, ran in the race. She was suspended from duty in November, just two days after being awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal at Buckingham Palace. Ever resourceful, Sian had already organised a hardship benefit in south London before Christmas – and another is scheduled for 23 March in east London with comedian Mark Thomas.

Sian, who has run marathons in Paris, London, New York and Copenhagen over the past few years, said the cross country fundraiser was a great way to raise both funds and get together with firefighter colleagues and supporters.

“Andy and Graham did a great job organising it – people had a good time and it was great to see firefighters take ownership of the race. I'm not fast but I do enjoy running. Let's hope there's another race organised by the union next year.” Oh yes, and the tea and cakes afterwards went down a treat too, Sian recalls.

Though billed as a fun run, elite athletes just can't help but run extremely fast. Graham and Andy know many top notch athletes in south west London through the running club network, and a good few were keen to race and raise funds. The dynamic duo didn't run themselves – as organisers, their role on the day was to make sure everything ran smoothly.



Participants in the fun run ranged from elite athletes to amateurs

PICTURES: TIM HOY





Suspended firefighter Sian Griffiths – who is organising another benefit event – was one of the runners

GRAHAM ADAMS AND ANDY COLLINS

Watch manager Graham Adams and crew manager Andy Collins are London firefighters and elite sportsmen who stepped into the breach when a race usually organised by London Fire Brigade coincided with a bitter dispute

Fastest runner round the common was Kevin Quinn – who completed the 5.4 mile cross county course in 26 minutes. “He heard about the event and thought it was a great cause to support”, said Graham. Around 80% of those taking part were firefighters and their families.

Andy has competed in triathlons for 20 years – winning titles including the Iron Man Challenge in Lanzarote two years ago. He’s now ditched competitive swimming and cycling – but is hoping to complete the Rotterdam marathon in April in two hours forty minutes.

Sharpened motivation

He was among those who lost 20% of their pay during November and December. He realised there would be a lot of calls on the hardship fund – which sharpened his motivation.

He gives a telling glimpse into the impact the sackings threat had on firefighter morale: “It’s hard to concentrate when you fear you could be out of a job. It was awful.” It even had an impact on his training regime. “When you run, you are pushing yourself hard and everything else has to be balanced. When you’re not sleeping properly because sackings could be looming and your pay is being docked it’s very hard to concentrate.” Fortunately for colleagues and the fund, Andy and Graham knuckled down and organised the run.

Firefighters organising a race for firefighters certainly seems to have struck a chord with everyone involved. And the fact that it was an AssetCo-free zone was an added bonus. So will Andy and Graham be organising more races?

The pair hadn’t had a “proper debrief” as *Firefighter* went to press, Andy confided. But feedback had been very positive, and the Wimbledon Common race would provide “a good base to build on”. Or as Graham put it: “A precedent has been set.” It’s early days. But watch this space.

FBU London Region present:

MARK THOMAS

IAN SAVILLE

STEVE WHITE & THE PROTEST FAMILY
AND MORE

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All proceeds to the Hardship Fund



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Steve White F22 G/W
Walthamstow Folk Club

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THE STANDARD
1 BLACKHORSE LANE E17 6DS
WEDNESDAY 23RD MARCH 2011

Doors 7.45pm
BLACKHORSE ROAD

Prize quiz



Win a Bahco Expert telescopic bypass lopper

To win a telescopic gardening cutter in our revolutionary quiz, please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 March 2011 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 2011), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 The overthrow of the French monarchy climaxed in the storming of the Bastille in what year?

- A 1789
- B 1879
- C 1779
- D 1979



2 In what year did the successful workers' revolution in Russia take place?

- A 1719
- B 1917
- C 1919
- D 1945

4 In what year did the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (now known as Haiti) begin?

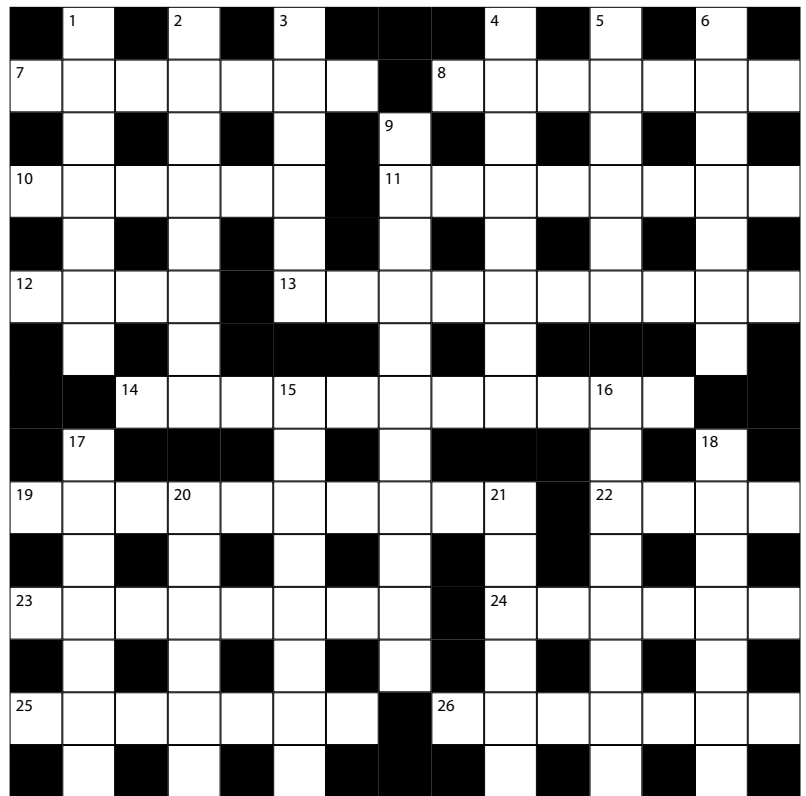
- A 1771
- B 1791
- C 1991
- D 1777

3 In what year was the US-backed Cuban dictator Batista overthrown by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara?

- A 1969
- B 1948
- C 1959
- D 1968

5 In what country did the recent people's uprising bring down the government?

- A Syria
- B Algeria
- C Egypt
- D Libya



CROSSWORD

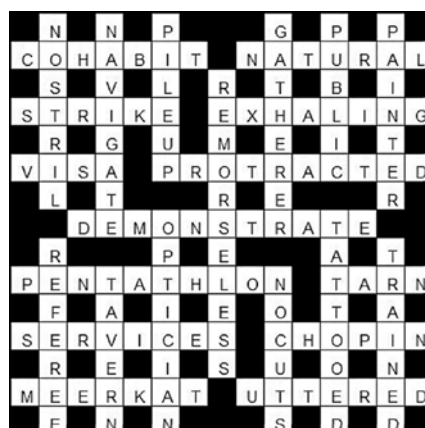
ACROSS

- 7** Discussed (7)
- 8** Place for a cuppa and cake (7)
- 10** Place of acrobats and clowns (6)
- 11** At any time (8)
- 12** Blood-red or white root vegetable or source of sugar (4)
- 13** This "hole" is the golf-course bar (10)
- 14** Of the flow of air around a moving body; able to fly (11)
- 19** Leaders of the 1917 Russian revolution (10)
- 22** What to demonstrate against in 24 on 2, 9 (4)
- 23** Enjoyable (8)
- 24** Where to demonstrate against 22 on 2, 9 (6)
- 25** Young hare (7)
- 26** Bet (7)

DOWN

- 1** The one that wins this one wins! (7)
- 2,9** When to demonstrate against 22 in 24 (5,3,6-5)
- 3** Reduce (6)
- 4** Loss of faculties (8)
- 5** Light wind (6)
- 6** The government even wants to privatise these wooded havens (7)
- 9** See 2
- 15** Performed surgery (8)
- 16** Seriously angered (8)
- 17** Coalminer (7)
- 18** Bent down (7)
- 20** Given a good blast with the hose? (6)
- 21** Eastern ruler (6)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution January/February

January/February quiz answers

- 1** B – Norway
- 2** B – Vladimir Putin
- 3** B – Sweden
- 4** C – The Christmas lottery
- 5** C – Russia

Winner of the October quiz
Martin Stebbings, Surrey

Station Cat

How safe are London's fire engines?

SPIN
NOW PR PEOPLE
THINK THEY CAN
SAVE LIVES

AssetCo fire sale?


 AssetCo – the private company charged with trying to break the London firefighters' strike last year and which also has the contract for looking after all London's fire appliances – is in financial trouble and seeking to re-finance itself, according to the *Financial Times*. And, as companies do when they're looking for a new source of money, it's putting its assets up as sureties. So far, so fair enough – until you remember that it doesn't just maintain London's fire engines – technically, it owns them, and leases them back to the London Fire Brigade. Does this mean that, if it defaults on its debts, all London's 169 fire engines could be forfeited to AssetCo's creditors?

Cliché corner


 This is, of course, the age of spin, but Station Cat didn't realise quite how much the spin doctors mattered until we read our weekly copy of the trade magazine *PR Week* over our morning bowl of milk. London Fire Brigade PR chief Richard Stokoe is quoted as saying: "It seems really clichéd, but the Fire Brigade is one of the few organisations I can think of where if you get communications right, you can stop people dying." The idea that it's the PR who saves lives seems to be gaining ground, at least among

the PRs. You may remember reading in this column about Stokoe's counterpart in Cheshire, Tim Bevington, whose smart saloon car has been fitted with a flashing blue light, so he can get to fires really fast. Readers of *Firefighter* will no doubt recall numerous occasions when only the prompt arrival of a top public relations consultant, screeching to a halt outside a burning building and shouting: "Let me through, I'm a spin doctor", prevented a massive death toll.

On the prowl


 The Cat still wants to know who leaked personal details of London firefighters to the *Mail on Sunday*. The paper had names and addresses and secondary jobs which could only have come from LFB's personnel files. They were used to back up a story alleging they were not committed to fire-fighting. What do we know?

What PRs do


 The FBU's Paul Embery put in a freedom of information request and got hold of some of Mr Stokoe's emails to the *Mail on Sunday* during the London firefighters' strike. "Have a squizz at this – this was the demo outside our place on Saturday night" he wrote above a link to some footage of a demonstration outside LFB headquarters. (No, the Cat doesn't know what a squizz is, either.)

Underneath is a series of allegations about dastardly things striking firefighters are supposed to have done, like making false 999 calls, and there's not the smallest evidence that they did any of them. That's what the PRs really do. So we know that Stokoe had regular contact with the MoS during the dispute, and tried hard to give them information which reflected badly on firefighters. But we'll need to keep on digging to find out who leaked firefighters' personal details to the MoS.

Video nasty


 The YouTube video Mr Stokoe wanted his contact to take a "squizz" at was fairly boring – just a few strikers shouting. Unlike the video you'll find at <http://tinyurl.com/63gjtq> where FBU president Mick Shaw describes how a car driven by strike-breaking station manager Chris Young drove straight into an FBU picket, Tam Ozdemir. A fire engine returned from an incident and drove into the fire station, slowly, at the legal maximum of five mph, so that the pickets could get out of the way. It was followed by a car, and as the pickets tried to talk to the driver, it accelerated suddenly and Tam was thrown into the windscreen, then several feet in front of the car. His colleagues asked the AssetCo employees for the first aid kit and some blankets, but they would not give them out.

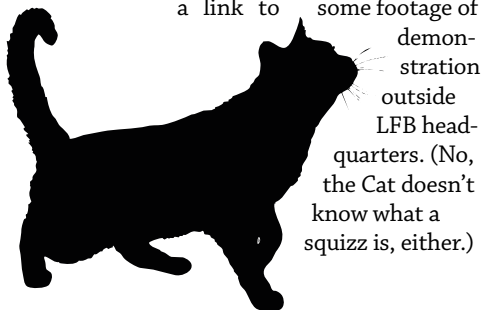
Not my business

 Tam is still off work and seriously unwell, three

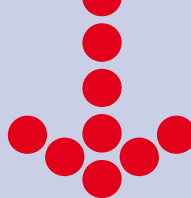
months later. He was due to attend his physical examination but was too ill – and the LFB sent him a warning letter. He's twice emailed Brian Coleman asking for an inquiry, but the chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority simply wrote back: "This is not a matter for me." Chris Young is back at work, and no action is to be taken against him.

Sun stroke

 The Cat's bullying tabloid hack of the month award goes to the Whitehall editor of the *Sun*, Clodagh Hartley. Sent to do a hatchet job on the Fire Brigades Union, she rang the FBU press office with some botched figures purporting to show that the top FBU officials take six figure sums in expenses. Actually, the figures she had were the figures for the whole of the union's travel, subsistence, hotels, national conferences, training schools, the lot, and no one who had thought about it for a moment could have imagined that four top officials could spend that sort of money on these things, even if they tried. The FBU press officer, having explained that, tried to get off the line to deal with other, perhaps more important, calls. "You can't do that, you're talking to the *Sun*", she said imperiously. "You think someone else is more important than the *Sun*? Right, I'll pass that on." You think it must have been a joke? You didn't hear it. There was no humour. It was a threat – clear and definite, if unspecific. It meant: "We can hurt you. Really hurt you."



25-year badges



Tommy Sheridan (r) S19 Sunbury fire station receives his 25-year badge from north area branch rep Alan Geddes with white watch looking on



Steven Pink (r) Richmond, LFB, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Gary Rashbrook



Andy Knott (l), Leek, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dean Murrell



Glenn Miller (l) receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Leroy Cubitt. Looking on (l-r) Guildford red watch: Steve Moran, Jon Uwins, Simon Edwards, Chris Edwards, Bob Beauchamp



Stephen Hamilton (r) Grampian FRS, receives his 25-year badge from Elgin branch secretary Alan Taylor. Bro Alan Kynoch (3rd from right) has since sadly passed away on duty



Fred Cummings (r) blue watch, Leek, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Andy Guy



Graham Wilton (r) receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Paul McIlvenny. Looking on (l-r) are John Fozzy, Dale Streeter, Matt Hitman, Vajrassiddhi and Samuel Bradgate



Rick Eyre (2nd l), red watch, Leek, Staffordshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dean Murrell (r). Looking on are Mark Shea (l) and Wayne Roberts

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership
Secretary or any change of address and
Head Office of changes to next of kin or
nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for
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For disciplinary and
employment-related queries
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representative.



Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk • Please include **full details** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.